



PICK PICK PICK

FREEDOM IS OVERRATED

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By Alba Pratalia

Act I, Scene 1: “The Plantation Overture”

Setting: Alabama, 1850s. Cotton fields stretching to the horizon. A cartoonishly oversized sun.

Everything is surreal and exaggerated like a Busby Berkeley nightmare.

Musical Number – to the tune of Benny Goodman’s “Sing Sing Sing”

(Driving jazz rhythm. A big band offstage. Stage lights flare up like a vaudeville fever dream.)

CHORUS (dancing and picking rhythmically):

Pick pick pick pick, everybody start to pick like dee dee dee,

CRACK CRACK CRACK! *(whip sound)*

Now you're pickin' with a whip!

Pick pick pick pick, everybody start to pick like dee dee dee,

CRACK CRACK CRACK! *(whip + Wilhelm scream)*

Now you're pickin' with a bleed!

Verse 2 – SLAVE DRIVER (crooning like Cab Calloway, absurdly dandy):

*Ain't no rest, it's the pickin' fest,
Sun up to down in your Sunday best!
Ragtime chains with a boogie beat,
Even Jim Crow's got happy feet!*

CHORUS:

*Snap snap snap snap, cotton's king and you're the
drumline now,*

WHACK WHACK WHACK! *(tap dancing in
chains)*

Now you're pickin' in the South!

*Pick pick pick pick, jive it out while you sweat and
cough,*

THUD THUD THUD! *(someone faints)*

Now you're pickin' yourself off!

Visual Gag:

A chorus line of tap-dancing Confederates enters in seersucker suits, trying to keep up with the rhythm and failing miserably. One has a mint julep in hand,

spills it, slips, and is whipped by accident. Slaves keep dancing. The absurdity climbs.

Finale – ALL (joyously deranged):

Pick that cotton, swing that pain,

Bleed in rhythm, not in vain!

Jazz it up, the field's alive,

It's Alabama! 185—jive!

(Curtains swoosh in. A jazz trumpet screams like a tortured banshee.)

Act I, Scene 2: “If It Ain’t Got That Whip”

Parody of “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)”

Spotlight on MAMA NEGRO — regal, towering, sashaying in a tattered but somehow fabulous gown, clutching a fan made of cotton bolls. The field goes silent as she takes center stage.

MAMA NEGRO (bold, gospel-jazz voice):

We don't pick a thing

If it ain't got that whip! (SNAP!)

NEGROES IN THE FIELD (tight harmony, finger-snapping):

Du-wa du-wa du-wa du-wa

MAMA NEGRO:

We don't pick a thing,

All you got to do is whip! (CRACK!)

NEGROES:

Du-wa du-wa du-wa du-wa

MAMA NEGRO (now strutting, Charleston-ing between rows of cotton):

It makes no difference if it's sweet or hot—

Just keep that whip and give everything you got!

(She strikes a pose. Cotton explodes like confetti.)

ALL TOGETHER (full-blown jazz explosion):

We don't pick a thing,

If it ain't got that WHIP!

WHIP SOLO – a tap dancer mimics lashes in rhythm, jazz hands flailing.

Meanwhile, a Confederate general peeks from a bush, furiously scribbling notes for future minstrel shows, and gets conked on the head by a falling bale of cotton.

Closing pose: all workers mid-jazz split, Mama Negro lifted high like a jazz crucifix, shouting—
Mama said WHIP IT GOOD!

Act I, Scene 3: “Words of Wisdom (Slavery, Slavery)”

Setting: The Big House. Inside, it's absurdly baroque — chandeliers shaped like cotton flowers, velvet drapes, and an oil painting of the owner shaking hands with the Devil (caption: “A Good Deal”).

PLANTATION OWNER (Colonel Bixby J.
Grumblewump), behind an imposing mahogany
desk, muttering as he scribbles:

BIXBY (grumbling):

“Bills, bills, always bills!

Feed for the horse, feed for the slaves, whiskey for
me...

How’s a Southern gentleman supposed to turn a
profit?”

*(He slams his ledger shut. The room dims. A single
spotlight hits him. Dramatic piano arpeggios begin
– parody of Let It Be.)*

BIXBY (singing with trembling sincerity):

When I find myself in financial of trouble,

Mother Africa comes to me,

Speaking words of wisdom...

Slavery, slavery...

*(He rises slowly, hand over heart, gazing reverently
at a dollar bill with George Washington blackfaced
on it.)*

*And in my hour of darkness,
She is standing right in front of me,
Speaking words of wisdom...*
Slavery, slavery...

**(Gospel-style backup singers emerge, all white
plantation ghosts in powdered wigs and confederate
underpants.)**

*Slavery, slavery, slavery, slavery... (waving flags
made of unpaid invoices)*

BIXBY (twirling with increasing madness):

*And when the broken columns fall,
There will be an answer—*

Enslave thee! (points at random audience member)

Ghost CHORUS:

*Let them bleed, let them toil,
Let them harvest in the soil!*

There will be an answer...

Slavery!

(Finale: Bixby drops to his knees, arms outstretched in front of a burning cotton bush that sings in falsetto.)

Act I, Scene 4: “The Luckiest People”

A surreal stage. A heavenly plantation veranda floats in a pastel sky. A golden spotlight hits a slow-moving chorus line of identical plantation owners — each a grotesque parody: alabaster suits, giant straw hats like parasols, and canes that double as monocles.

Orchestral swell begins — parody of Barbra Streisand’s “People.” Slow. Reverent. Hypocritically tender.

THE PLANTATION OWNER CHORUS (in unison, like a barbershop Streisand cult):

People...

People who own people...

Are the luckiest people in the world...

(They lift their canes together like holy relics.)

Negroes are very special people,

They're the cheapest people in the world...

*(One of them faints with joy. Another fans him with
a Confederate flag.)*

With one negro,

One very special negro...

A feeling deep in your soul...

Says you were half, now you're whole!

No more hunger and thirst...

*(They mime eating from a silver tray held by an
invisible slave.)*

**SOLO – the Oldest Owner (baritone, with
grandiose vibrato):**

But first...

Be a person... who owns... people...

ALL (*crescendo, arms wide as if blessing a revival tent*):

People... who own people...

Are the luckiest people... in the world!

(Explosion of cotton confetti. A gospel choir of enslaved souls sings "Hallelujah" in a minor key from below the floorboards.)

Act I, Scene 5: "THINK (Who Needs Freedom?)"

Setting: The slave quarters. A stark contrast — dim lantern light, shadows of wooden shacks, smoke from a cooking fire. But rhythm is rising.

Something's cooking other than stew: irony, sass, and volcanic sarcasm. Enter MAMA NEGRO again, in full soul diva mode, with a backup crew of tired but fabulous slaves ready to rip the roof off history.

Cue the horn blast — the unmistakable riff of Aretha Franklin’s “Think.” The whole camp jolts alive like a funky resurrection.

MAMA NEGRO (hand on hip, fierce and ironic):

You better think (think)

Think about what cotton gonna pick!

Yeah, think (think, think)

Let your mind go — just choose the best!

CHORUS (all with attitude, holding tools like mics):

Oh, freedom (freedom), freedom (freedom)

Oh, freedom — who needs freedom?

Freedom (freedom), oh oh freedom (freedom)

WHO needs freedom?! (they all shrug in beat, sassy)

MAMA (breaking it down, full Aretha power):

You say you wanna run away, huh?

Hide in swamps, fight, rebel, scream?

Well maybe you should THINK, baby,

Where you gonna get your collard greens?!

(Two backup dancers mime sneaking and getting whipped, then jazz-hands back into line.)

CHORUS:

*You better think (think)
Before you start dreamin' of North-bound ships!
'Cause up in Boston, sugar,
You still cleanin' rich folks' shiiiiips!*

(They all laugh and spin, sudden soul-train line forms.)

MAMA NEGRO (final belt):

*Freedom's just another word... for "ain't got no corn
bread!"
Think about it!*

*(Everyone freezes mid-funky pose. One lone kazoo
finishes the final note. Blackout.)*

Act I, Scene 6: "The Wonderful Negro of the South"

Setting: A smoky battlefield in Georgia, absurdly

colorful. Union troops in full Civil War gear — blue jackets, glistening bayonets, boots shining like Broadway tap shoes. The drumline kicks in — but it's not martial, it's a merry skip-hop, part Wizard of Oz, part Cabaret, part brain damage.

CHORUS OF UNION TROOPS (flouncing in perfect choreography):

*We're off to free the Negroes,
The wonderful Negroes of South!
(skip-hop, shuffle shuffle, high kick)
Because, because, because, because,
They're SO good picking cotton out!*

SOLO – UNION SERGEANT (tenor, dead serious, twirling musket like a cane):

*For here he is — the Negro, a worker,
A penny-worth worker!*

CHORUS (marching in drag-like unison):

*If ever, oh ever, a Negro was,
The Negro of South is one because,*

*Because because because because because
because...*

*(Lines get faster. Bayonets now used like parasols in
a Busby Berkeley swirl.)*

Because of the wonderful cheap labor he does!

(On that line, the troops freeze like Rockette dolls
mid-split. Glittery cotton rains down. One of the
soldiers dramatically sobs into a plantation map.)

SARGE (whispers to audience):

“Free the Negro, save the Union... and still get that
economic boon? God *bless* emancipation.”

**Act I, Scene 7: “All By Myself (Emancipation
Blues)”**

*Setting: The White House. Empty. Dim. One
solitary chair, center stage. Spotlight. Enter
ABRAHAM LINCOLN — lanky, tragic,*

melodramatic, draped in shadows like a Civil War Dracula.

Cue soft piano. The unmistakable lament of Eric Carmen's "All by Myself." The audience holds their breath. Lincoln removes his stovepipe hat, holds it to his chest like a dead puppy. Begins to sing, eyes moist, voice trembling with unearned martyrdom.

LINCOLN (solo, full diva ballad mode):

All by myself...

I freed the slave...

All by myself...

The negro...

(He looks longingly at a cracked copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. A single tear rolls down his cheek.)

Hard to be sure,

Sometimes I feel so insecure...

And love's so distant and obscure...

Remains... the cure...

*(He rises slowly. Climbs onto his desk like it's the
prow of a ship. Thunder claps. A bald eagle flies
overhead in slow motion.)*

All by myself...

I freed the slave...

All by myself...

The negro...

**(Sudden gospel choir of freedmen behind him,
harmonizing dramatically. One of them mutters,
"...sure, with 600,000 corpses and a Union war
machine, but okay, Abe.")**

LINCOLN (ignoring history):

I gave them hope, I gave them dreams...

I gave them a war and five-dollar greens...

CHOIR (background):

He freed the slaves... kinda sorta...

(Curtains close on Abe mid-power note, arms wide like a Yassified messiah, as the choir side-eyes him into fade-out.)

Act II, Scene 1: “Sixteen Tons (And Still Picking)”

Setting: 1930s West Virginia. Deep inside a coal mine. The stage is claustrophobic — beams creak, dust fills the air, canaries drop like flies. Dim lantern light reveals the same Negro chorus from the cotton fields — now older, grimmer, dressed in miner’s gear, eyes sunken, but voices deeper, rougher, full of coal soot and bitterness.

MAMA NEGRO (now grizzled, smoking a stubby cigar):

Some people say a man is made out of mud...

A poor man's made out of muscle and blood...

Muscle and blood and skin and bones...

A mind that's weak... and a back that's strong...

(The men start working in rhythm, pickaxes falling with perfect choreography. The coal dust forms ghostly shapes in the spotlight — Confederate generals, plantation mansions, crushed by rhythm.)

CHORUS (swinging picks):

*You load sixteen tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt...
Saint Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go—
I owe my soul to the company store!*

SOLO – BIG LEROY (baritone, slicked with sweat):

*I was freed by Lincoln, now I'm owned by debt,
Traded my whip for a loan I ain't paid off yet!
They gave me boots, a helmet and lies,
Now I mine coal beneath Confederate skies...*

CHORUS:

*You load sixteen tons, what do you get?
A union that's busted and lungs full of regret!
Saint Peter, don't you knock at my door,
I'm three years behind at the company store!*

(Steam whistle blows. They all collapse in synchronized exhaustion. Mama Negro coughs, looks up, and says:)

“Freedom’s just another shift with a new damn uniform.”

Act II, Scene 2: “Smoke Gets In Your Eyes (And Other Places)”

Setting: 1950s Alabama. A dusty roadside. Stage left: a sad, corroded water fountain labeled “COLOURED,” barely dripping. Stage right: a glimmering, porcelain monument of hydration labeled “WHITES ONLY,” humming, misting, lit like the Holy Grail. Five weary Black men stand stage left, sharing a rust-flavored sip like it’s communion.

A single saxophone moans in the distance — slow, smoky. Spotlight fades in on the group, forming a jazz quintet of sorrow. One man steps forward,

*takes a long, metallic gulp, then sings — parody of
“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” but with a beat-up soul.*

LEAD NEGRO (smooth tenor, bitter crooner):

They asked me how I knew...

My fucked life was fucked...

Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh...

I, of course, replied:

"Racism here inside cannot be denied..."

*(The others join in with soft harmony — doo-wop
style, snapping fingers, leaning against segregation.)*

CHORUS (doo-wop):

Do-do-do, do-do-do, do-do-do... whoa...

**SECOND NEGRO (mocking baritone, pointing to
sign):**

They said, “Someday you’ll find—”

“Negro, stay behind...”

LEAD:

Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh... when your Negro’s on fire...

You must realize...

ALL TOGETHER:

Smoke gets in your eyes...

(Suddenly, a match lights a burning cross in the distance. They pause. One takes a drag from a cigarette with the same fire, exhales slowly.)

THIRD NEGRO (deadpan):

“...and sometimes, also your lungs.”

(They go back to sipping their fountain drop by drop. One taps the pipe. Another tries to wring sweat from his shirt for moisture. Laughter fades into music.)

Act II, Scene 3: “Bang Bang (They Shot Me Down)”

Setting: 1992, South Central Los Angeles. The air is thick with smoke and rage. Sirens howl in surround sound. On all four corners of the stage: riot cops,

riot shields, riot batons, riot everything. Tinted visors. Locked knees. Guns drawn. Dead-eyed.

Center stage: our eternal Negroes — the same souls from the plantation, the mines, the fields. Now dressed in tight pastel minidresses, go-go boots, and oversized sunglasses à la Nancy Sinatra. Dead serious. Lipstick and fury. Spotlights rotate around them like helicopters.

A twangy, echoing guitar riff. The lights strobe like incoming flashbangs. One Negro steps forward, sings in breathy vengeance.

LEAD (in soft, eerie Nancy whisper):

We was five and they was troops...

We walked in fire avenues...

We were Black and they were white...

They would always win the fight...

(The others step up behind, slow-motion arm choreography like weaponized Motown.)

ALL (haunting unison):

Bang bang... they shot us down...

Bang bang... we hit the ground...

Bang bang... that awful sound...

Bang bang... the cops just shot me down...

(Siren stabs. Gunshots echo. Strobe light hits every "bang." One dancer twirls, drops in silence. Another pulls a protest sign from their purse — "AM I NEXT?" — then folds it into a paper swan, releases it like a prayer.)

SECOND SOLO (stoic, cold):

Their clubs were raised like gospel swords...

Their badges gleamed like iron lords...

But boots don't wipe out grief or pride...

We died once then... and every time since we tried.

ALL:

Bang bang... the story's same...

Bang bang... just changed the name...

Bang bang... another round...

Bang bang... we're still on the ground...

(Lights dim to red. One final siren wail. Silence.)

Act III, Scene 1: “Breathless (Can’t Fight It)”

Setting: 2020. Minneapolis. Twilight. The stage is bare, bleak, lit in tones of streetlamp gold and riot smoke blue. A single police car burns silently in the corner like a twisted votive candle. There’s no movement yet — just heavy, tense stillness.

Center stage: the same five Negroes. Eternal. Recycled by history, dragged from cotton field to coal shaft to bus seat to street corner. Now, they all wear hyper-realistic George Floyd masks — expression frozen in pain, mouth gasping for air. They’re dressed in hoodies, jeans, and sorrow.

Soft opening notes of The Corrs’ “Breathless” — but slowed, mournful. Autotuned into distortion, like it’s being sung through a dying throat.

LEAD (soft falsetto, barely audible):

Go on, go on...

Leave me... breathless...

Come on... (come on)...

Yeah... yeah...

(They raise hands — all five. “Don’t shoot” position. Spotlight flickers.)

The daylight’s fading slowly...

But time with you is standing still...

I’m waiting for you only...

The slightest touch and I feel weak...

CHORUS (whispers growing louder):

I cannot lie...

From you I cannot hide...

And I’m losing the will to try...

Can’t hide it... (echo: can’t hide it...)

Can’t fight it... (can’t fight it...)

(Suddenly, flashing red-and-blue lights slice the stage. Sound of boots. Barked commands. The

Negroes drop one by one, crumpling slowly, masks first.)

BRIDGE (sung by dying breath):

So go on... go on...

Let me suffocate again...

I'm used to it now... this American end...

*(Final beat: all masks left behind on the ground.
Empty. Facing the audience.)*

Act III, Scene 2: “Glory Glory (White Profit’s Best for All)”

Setting: A surreal, dreamlike voting center.

Bleachers rise in the background like pews in a church. Long lines of African Americans stretch across the stage, slowly approaching ballot boxes. But each line is dressed to represent its era — zoot suits, Afros and bell-bottoms, Jordache jeans and boom boxes, Rocawear and Bluetooth headsets, MAGA caps and Yeezys.

As each line steps forward, they drop their ballots in with solemn, robotic precision. Stage left: an enormous American flag, tattered and patched with logos (Exxon, McDonald's, Lockheed Martin). Stage right: a wax statue of John Brown, hunched and weeping. Above it, a flashing neon sign:
“DEMOCRACY: ALL SALES FINAL.”

Music swells — not the triumphant version of “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” but a slow, funereal march. Drums like coffins being closed.

CHORUS OF VOTERS (in haunting unison):

*John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave...
John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave...
John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave...
Just right where he belongs...*

(They raise hands to their hearts as they vote — for Nixon, Reagan, Bush, Bush again, Trump, Trump again. Every box clicked echoes like a death knell.)

REFRAIN (crescendo, with grotesque pageantry):

Glory, glory, hallelujah...

Glory, glory, hallelujah...

Glory, glory, hallelujah...

White profit's best for all!

(Suddenly, red-white-and-blue ticker tape falls. A bald eagle coughs. A gospel choir of CEOs waves bonus checks. A hologram of Frederick Douglass awkwardly claps next to a golden statue of Elon Musk riding a police horse.)

MAMA NEGRO (emerging from the shadows):

“Land of the free, home of the slave. But hey — at least the ballot box is segregated *by delusion now*.”

(Curtain drops as electronic voting machines print receipts labeled: “Thank you for participating in systemic stability.”)

Act III, Scene 3: “Think (Freedom is Overrated)”

Setting: Today. Present day. The same five Negroes. Timeless. Eternal. But now they’re fully dripped out in 2020s fashion — Supreme hoodies, Yeezys, Beats by Dre, Fenty, high-end athleisure, Bluetooth earbuds blinking like status symbols. One is holding a Starbucks. One is vlogging. One is checking crypto. One is mid-TikTok dance. The last is ordering Uber Eats.

The beat drops — Aretha’s “Think”, but hyperpop remix. EDM build, autotuned soul, TikTokified. The air is lit by the glow of phone screens.

LEAD (snapping selfies, voice digitized but soulful):

*You better think (think)
Think about what iPhone gonna pick!
Yeah, think (think, think)
Let your mind go — you need the best!*

CHORUS (strutting like runway models):

Oh, freedom (freedom), freedom (freedom)

*Oh, freedom — who needs freedom?
Freedom (freedom), oh oh freedom (freedom)
Who needs freedom?!*

(They break into synchronized TikTok dance. In one hand: a protest sign that says “Black Lives Matter.” In the other: a Chick-fil-A milkshake. A cop drone floats overhead. No one looks up.)

VERSE – SECOND SOLO (airpods in, scrolling):

*You say you want to vote today,
But there’s new shoes just a tap away…
Freedom’s cool and kinda deep,
But have you seen the PS5 bundle this week?*

ALL (with a wink and a pose):

Think about it, baby!

(Suddenly, from above, a giant satin ribbon sign descends. Glistening, gold letters read:)

“FREEDOM IS OVERRATED”

(Confetti cannon explodes — but it's shredded copies of the Constitution. One Negro catches a scrap, reads it, shrugs, wipes nose.)

FINAL CHORUS (mock-happy, gospel glitz):

*Freedom's just another brand,
Streaming on-demand...
Freedom (freedom), oh oh freedom (freedom)
Sponsored by Meta and Instagram...*

(They strike a final influencer pose as ring lights hit their faces. A "LIVE NOW" overlay appears on the backdrop. Fade to black.)

A Plantation Musical for the Post-Truth Generation

*From the cotton fields of 1850s Alabama to
TikTok-era consumerism — comes a vaudeville
inferno so wrong it might just be right.*

Slaves tap-dance in chains.

Confederates spill mint juleps mid-jazz hands.

Lincoln sobs like a diva.

And Mama Negro belts Aretha with fire, sass,
and a fan made of cotton bolls.

This isn't your history teacher's slavery lesson.

This is a Busby Berkeley nightmare scored to
ragtime, soul, and hyperpop.

Every scene explodes with surreal irony, every
whip crack is syncopated, every hymn
corrupted into capitalist gospel.

“Freedom is overrated,” they sing —

...and you'll laugh, choke, weep, and wonder if
you're allowed to be enjoying this much truth.